

1 What is claimed is:

2 1. An apparatus for dissociating gases comprising:

3 a) a plasma chamber;

4 b) a transformer having a magnetic core surrounding a portion of the plasma
5 chamber and a primary winding;

6 c) one or more switching semiconductor devices directly coupled to a voltage
7 supply and having an output coupled to the primary winding,

8 the one or more switching semiconductor devices driving current in the
9 primary winding, the current inducing a potential inside the chamber that
10 forms a plasma which completes a secondary circuit of the transformer.

11 2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the voltage supply comprises a line voltage
12 supply or a bus voltage supply.

13 3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the one or more switching semiconductor
14 devices comprises one or more switching transistors.

15 4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the output of the one or more switching
16 semiconductor devices is directly coupled to the primary winding.

17 5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the chamber comprises a metallic material.

18 6. The apparatus of claim 5 wherein the metallic material comprises aluminum.

19 7. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the chamber comprises a dielectric material.

20 8. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising an electrode positioned in the
21 chamber that generates free charges which assist the ignition of a plasma in the
22 chamber.

- 1 9. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising an electrode capacitively coupled to
2 the chamber that generates free charges which assist the ignition of a plasma in
3 the chamber.
- 4 10. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising an ultraviolet light source optically
5 coupled to the chamber that generates free charges which assist the ignition of a
6 plasma in the chamber.
- 7 11. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a circuit for measuring electrical
8 parameters of the primary winding and the plasma, the electrical parameters
9 including one or more of the current driving the primary winding, a voltage across
10 the primary winding, a bus voltage, an average power in the primary winding, and
11 a peak power in the primary winding.
- 12 12. The apparatus of claim 11 further comprising a power control circuit coupled to
13 an output of the circuit for measuring electrical parameters of the primary winding
14 and the plasma, the power control circuit determining the current flowing through
15 the primary windings from a measurement of the electrical properties of the
16 primary winding and of the plasma and from a predetermined set point
17 representing a desired operating condition.
- 18 13. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a process chamber that is coupled to
19 the plasma chamber and positioned to receive reactive gas generated by the
20 plasma.
- 21 14. An apparatus for generating ions comprising:
- 22 a) a plasma chamber;
- 23 b) a transformer having a magnetic core surrounding a portion of the plasma
24 chamber and a primary winding;

- 1 c) one or more switching semiconductor devices directly coupled to a voltage
2 supply and having an output coupled to the primary winding,
- 3 the one or more switching semiconductor devices driving current in the
4 primary winding, the current inducing a potential inside the chamber that
5 forms a plasma which completes a secondary circuit of the transformer.
- 6 d) an orifice positioned in the chamber for directing ions generated by the
7 plasma.
- 8 15. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein the voltage supply comprises a line voltage
9 supply or a bus voltage supply.
- 10 16. The apparatus of claim 14 further comprising a process chamber that is coupled to
11 the orifice in the plasma chamber and adapted to receive ions generated by the
12 plasma.
- 13 17. The apparatus of claim 16 further comprising accelerating electrodes positioned in
14 the process chamber for accelerating ions generated by the plasma.
- 15 18. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein the chamber comprises a refractory metal.
- 16 19. An apparatus for dissociating gases comprising:
- 17 a) a plasma chamber comprising an electrically conductive material and at
18 least one dielectric region that prevents induced current flow in the
19 chamber;
- 20 b) a transformer having a magnetic core surrounding a portion of the plasma
21 chamber and a primary winding;
- 22 c) a power supply having an output electrically connected to the primary
23 winding,

- 1 the power supply driving current in the primary winding, the current
2 inducing a potential inside the chamber that forms a plasma which
3 completes a secondary circuit of the transformer.
- 4 20. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the chamber comprises a plurality of dielectric
5 regions separating at least two regions of the plasma chamber.
- 6 21. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the dielectric region comprises at least one of a
7 dielectric spacer or a dielectric coating on at least one mating surface of the
8 chamber.
- 9 22. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the chamber comprises aluminum.
- 10 23. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the chamber comprises cooling channels for
11 passing a fluid that controls the temperature of the chamber.
- 12 24. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the power supply comprises one or more
13 switching semiconductor devices directly coupled to a voltage supply and having
14 an output coupled to the primary winding.
- 15 25. The apparatus of claim 24 wherein the voltage supply comprises a line voltage
16 supply or a bus voltage supply.
- 17 26. The apparatus of claim 19 further comprising an electrode positioned in the
18 chamber that generates free charges which assist the ignition of a plasma in the
19 chamber.
- 20 27. The apparatus of claim 19 further comprising an electrode capacitively coupled to
21 the chamber that generates free charges which assist the ignition of a plasma in
22 the chamber.
- 23 28. The apparatus of claim 19 further comprising an ultraviolet light source optically
24 coupled to the chamber which assists the ignition of a plasma in the chamber.

- 1 29. A method for dissociating gases comprising:
- 2 a) providing a chamber for containing a gas at a pressure;
- 3 b) providing a transformer having a magnetic core surrounding a portion of
- 4 the chamber and a primary winding;
- 5 c) directly coupling one or more switching semiconductor devices to a
- 6 voltage supply and generating a current driving the primary winding with
- 7 the one or more switching semiconductor devices; and
- 8 d) inducing a potential inside the chamber with the current in the primary
- 9 winding, the potential forming a plasma which completes a secondary
- 10 circuit of the transformer.
- 11 30. The method of claim 29 wherein the step of directly coupling one or more
- 12 switching semiconductor devices to a voltage supply comprises directly coupling
- 13 the one or more switching semiconductor devices to a line voltage supply or to a
- 14 bus voltage supply.
- 15 31. The method of claim 29 further comprising the step of directly coupling the one
- 16 or more switching semiconductor devices to the primary winding.
- 17 32. The method of claim 29 further comprising the step of providing an initial
- 18 ionization event in the chamber.
- 19 33. The method of claim 32 wherein the step of providing an initial ionization event
- 20 in the chamber comprises applying a voltage pulse to the primary winding.
- 21 34. The method of claim 32 wherein the step of providing an initial ionization event
- 22 in the chamber comprises exposing the chamber to ultraviolet light.
- 23 35. The method of claim 29 wherein the gas comprises a noble gas.

- 1 36. The method of claim 29 wherein the gas comprises a reactive gas.
- 2 37. The method of claim 29 wherein the gas comprises a mixture of a reactive gas and
3 a noble gas.
- 4 38. The method of claim 29 further comprising the step of measuring electrical
5 parameters of the primary winding and of the plasma including one or more of the
6 current driving the primary winding, a voltage across the primary winding, a bus
7 voltage, an average power in the primary winding, and a peak power in the
8 primary winding.
- 9 39. The method of claim 37 further comprising the step of determining an output of
10 the one or more switching semiconductor devices from the measurement of the
11 electrical parameters of the primary winding and of the plasma and from a
12 predetermined set point representing a desired operating condition.
- 13 40. The method of claim 29 wherein the pressure is substantially between 1 mtorr and
14 100 torr.
- 15 41. The method of claim 29 wherein an electric field of the plasma is substantially
16 between 1-100 V/cm.
- 17 42. A method for cleaning a process chamber comprising:
- 18 a) providing a plasma chamber for containing a reactive gas at a pressure, the
19 plasma chamber being coupled to the process chamber;
- 20 b) providing a transformer having a magnetic core surrounding a portion of
21 the plasma chamber and a primary winding;
- 22 c) directly coupling one or more switching semiconductor devices to a
23 voltage supply and generating a current driving the primary winding with
24 the one or more switching semiconductor devices;

- 1 d) inducing a potential inside the chamber with the current in the primary
2 winding, the potential forming a plasma which completes a secondary
3 circuit of the transformer; and
- 4 e) directing chemically active species generated in the plasma from the
5 plasma chamber into the process chamber thereby cleaning the process
6 chamber.
- 7 43. A method for generating reactive gases comprising:
- 8 a) providing a plasma chamber for containing a reactive gas at a pressure;
- 9 b) providing a transformer having a magnetic core surrounding a portion of
10 the plasma chamber and a primary winding;
- 11 c) directly coupling one or more switching semiconductor devices to a
12 voltage supply and generating a current driving the primary winding with
13 the one or more switching semiconductor devices;
- 14 d) inducing a potential inside the chamber with the current in the primary
15 winding, the potential forming a plasma which completes a secondary
16 circuit of the transformer; and
- 17 e) generating reactive gas in the plasma.